



BEZANGO, WA 985 # 2

Hidden in the Coastal Mountains of Southwest Washington State is an obscure town far from Interstate 5, far from the sphere of influence of a major metropolitan region. Welcome to Bezango, Washington. Allow me to introduce you to a few of our citizens.



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Another morning in Bezango. Like other rural towns in Southwest Washington, the citizens of this damp village awake to the sounds of the distant rooster, the whistle at the mill, and the rumbling motors of logging trucks as their engines warm up. But unlike other places, they also hear Mr. Bricker.

At sunup, if you look over the fence in Mr. Bricker's back yard, you'll see an older gentleman wrapped in a faded bathrobe, hunched over as he scans his perfect lawn (nicknamed the "golf course" by neighbors) in search of molehills. He'll stop and stare at one for a long time, and then, when he thinks there is movement under the soil, he'll whip out his pistol and fire five or six shots. This happens every morning. And he's the only one on the block with moles in his yard. Been that way for years.

It is time for that special annual event, the Mountain Beaver Festival! The serving of mountain beaver burgers is always a big draw for tourists, and if you come you'll notice this gastronomical delight is never consumed by the locals for some reason. We used to have a big carnival too, but several years ago some Bezango boys tipped over a portable toilet that just happened to be occupied by the carnival manager. He vowed never to return to the Mountain Beaver Festival. But hey, we ... I mean, they were just having a little fun y'know.

But who needs a carnival anyway when we have the best darn parade in the state? Every year we have the same Mountain Beaver Festival Queen, an honor that has been bestowed on one person for the last 15 years: Oscar Sneedmoss. Oscar likes being the Queen, and no one is inclined to take this pleasure away from him, especially since Oscar likes opening beer bottles with his teeth.



I can see several of you squirming up your eyes and asking, "Just what the heck is a 'mountain beaver' anyway?" It is not a real beaver in any sense, in fact this raccoon-sized critter is basically a big rat that only lives in the coastal range of the Great Pacific Northwest, oh, and in Oregon too (the Not-So-Great Pacific Northwest). The mountain beaver (*Aplodontia rufa*) is the only living member of the Protogomorpha sub-order, which makes them sort of a living fossil, a prehistoric rodent with a lineage that dates back around 50 million years. That ain't yesterday. Pretty neat, huh? Our hills are filled with them. They cry white tears, eat their own crap, and live in long, complicated tunnels that tear the hell out of the forest floor.

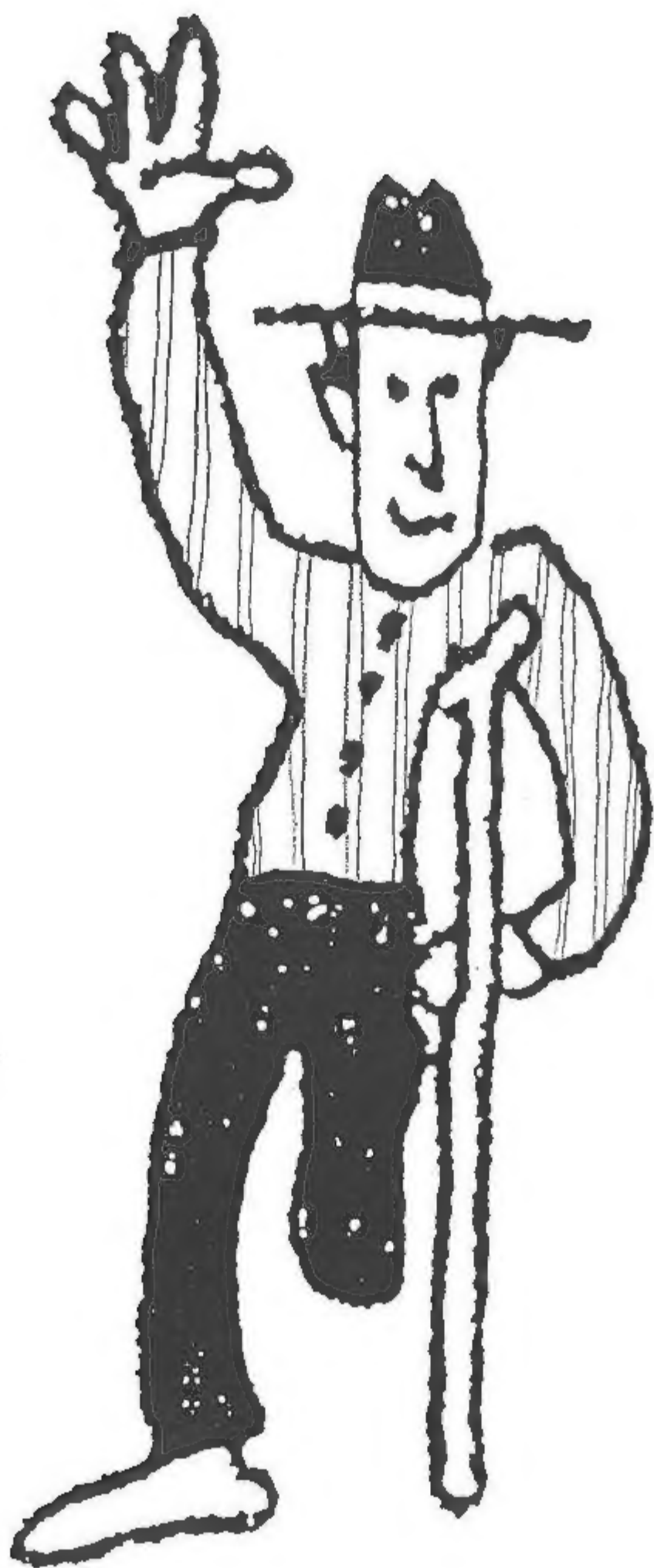
They are nocturnal loners and can be very dangerous if cornered. I couldn't tell you what they taste like. Ever since I saw a mountain beaver burger with a few strands of fur sticking out between the buns, I've never had the nerve to try one.

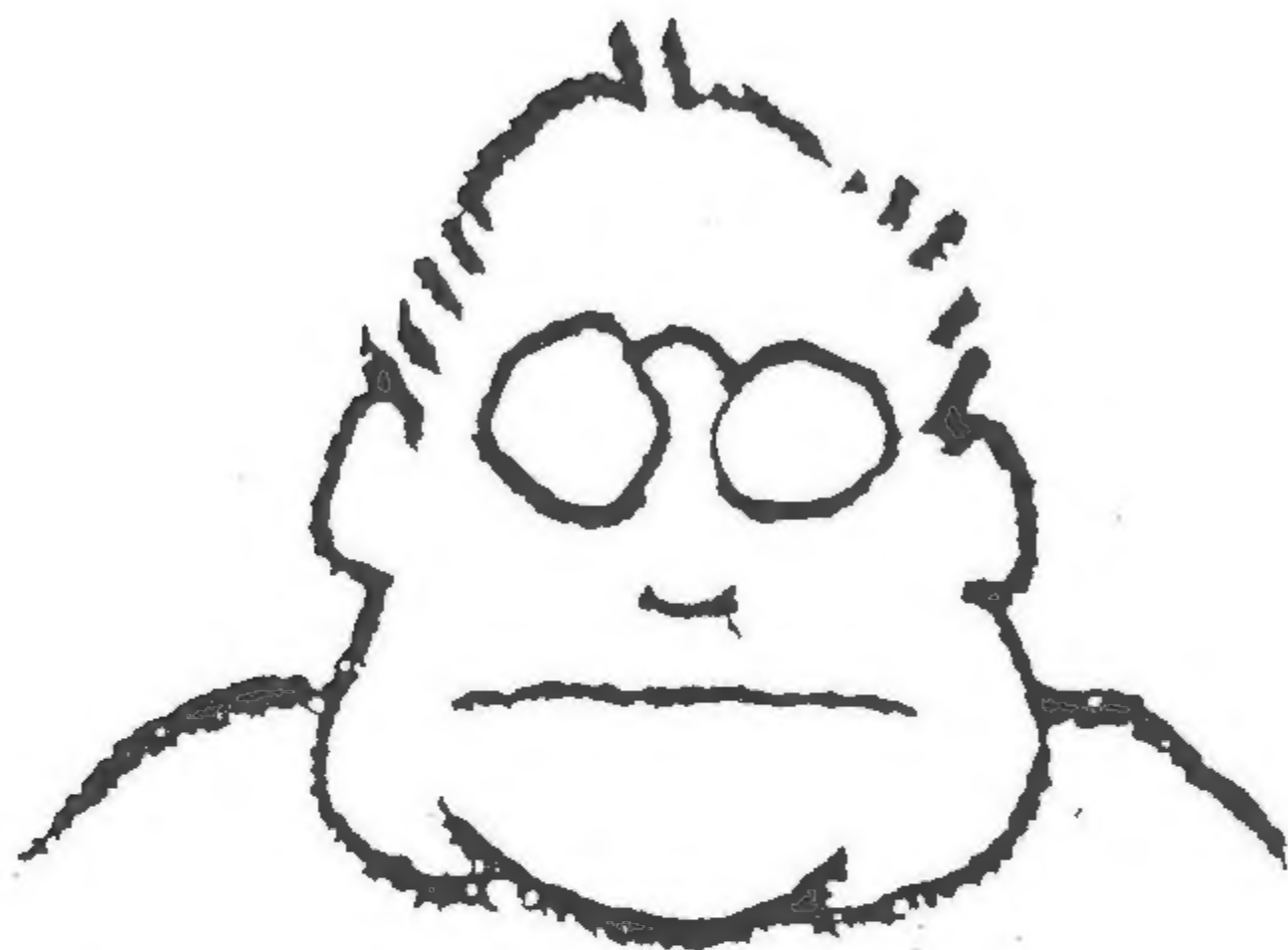
They are very hard to catch. Certain people in town want to snag one and let it loose in Mr. Bricker's yard.

Rufus Borker likes to scare the bejeezus out of the Mountain Beaver Festival tourists who are thinking of going for a hike in our surrounding woods. "Take care that you don't step in one of them mountain beavers holes," he'll gleefully warn, "Or they'll go nip-nip-nip, and eat your feet!" He illustrates this by pretending his thumb and fingers are mountain beaver teeth whenever he gets to the "nip-nip-nip" part. And he concludes these cautionary sermons with a long, wheezy, asthmatic nicotine-stained one-stroke sort of laugh as he slaps his thigh.



Oh, I almost forgot. We have a Mountain Beaver
Festival King too. Perry Thiessen.





After the parade, there are various social functions to choose from. One of them is the Pancake Lunch at the New Pedestrian Christian Church. Before lunch is served, but after grace, those in attendance are expected to join in a chorus of the official Bezango anthem, which was composed by the Rev. Charles "Grabby" Hands. Actually, no one calls him "Grabby" to his face. Here's the song:

“Like the ancient mountain beaver and banana slug,
We live in this dense forest like some big shag rug
There’s no TV without satellite, the malls are far away,
But I’m glad I’m not a Seattleite, I don’t want to live that way
And yes it rains a little Well, in fact it rains a lot
But the air is always clean and it never gets too hot
No matter where it itches, we can always scratch,
And if you want more coffee we’ll brew another batch.
Our forebears worked very hard to build this place for us,
It will always be a part of me, even if I leave on a bus

O Bezango, Bezango, the mossy city in the hills,
A bright beacon of brotherhood, a place of quiet thrills ”

This is sung with great feeling and never fails to impress
the new visitor It is not unusual to see a hardened logger
furtively wiping away a tear at the conclusion of the anthem



Meanwhile, another gathering is taking place at the "Head Loader," Bezango's most popular tavern. Many of the Mountain Beaver Festival Parade participants land here after the event to unwind. "Tot" is our local little person who stands 30 inches tall. He loves cigars and uses language that even makes loggers blush. Every year he marches in the parade in a mountain beaver costume, which is very effective since he isn't much larger than the real thing. Someone from another town asked if he would march in their local parade, to which he replied, "Go get your own damn midget!"

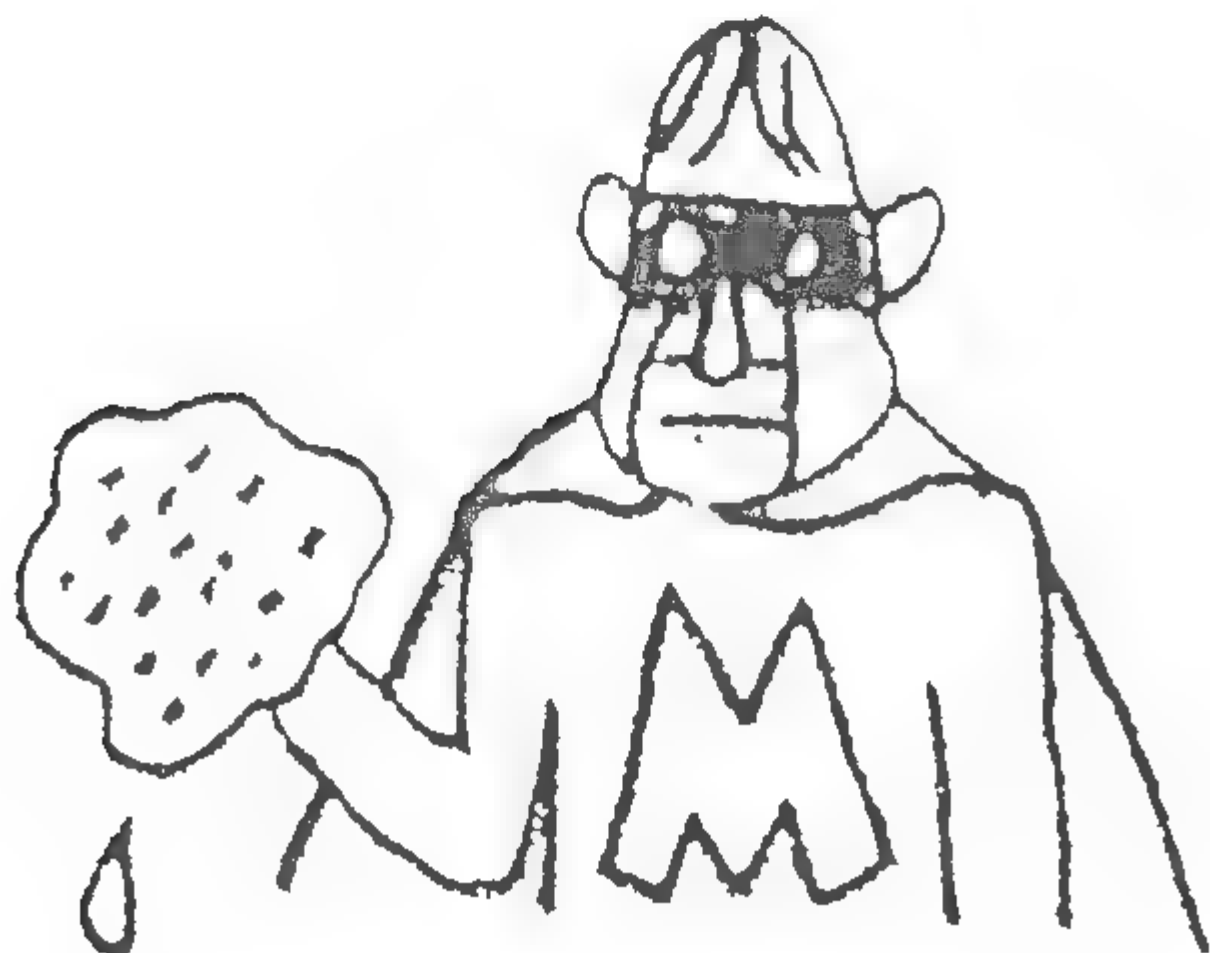
Down at the other end of the bar is Otho
Snacklebee His favorite trick, in fact his only trick,
is to "crack up with no neck " This consists of
hunching up his shoulders, making it appear his head
is sitting on his torso directly, and then letting loose
with a hale and hearty obvious fake laugh

The first time he did this, we thought it was mildly
amusing. That was 23 years ago.



If you don't mind me changing subjects, I'd like to mention another person in Bezango who has nothing to do with the Mountain Beaver Festival. He is known as the Midnight Sponge. If you spill something, like a glass of orange juice on the kitchen counter, you can call the Midnight Sponge at any time, doesn't matter if it is 2 in the morning or 2 in the afternoon, and he'll show up with a big sponge and clean the mess. We all know his true identity, but we pretend we don't. And when we run across his day-job self, we are always sure to praise the heroic deeds of that mysterious hero and conclude with, "I wonder who he really is. Where does he go? What dark secret is he protecting?" Then both of us go through a mutual bit of acting, since I'm sure he knows that we know who he really is.

If you want to know who he really is, I'm afraid you'll just have to move to Bezango.





Gordy drives around in a pickup truck that has an artificial leg as the only cargo in the bed. Been that way for several months. It rolls around and bangs on the metal sides as he turns corners. He has all of his natural limbs, so one can only wonder

There are several given facts of life you must accept if you live in Bezango Mountain beavers, slugs, rain, overcast skies, rain, moss, rain, and mold.

All of these pose different challenges, and each one has sort of a gatekeeper that serves as the local expert. Rufus Borker is Bezango's mountain beaver reference person for example The authority on mold is Alice Moop

Here is what Alice will tell you, "I'm old, but I know what I know about mold "

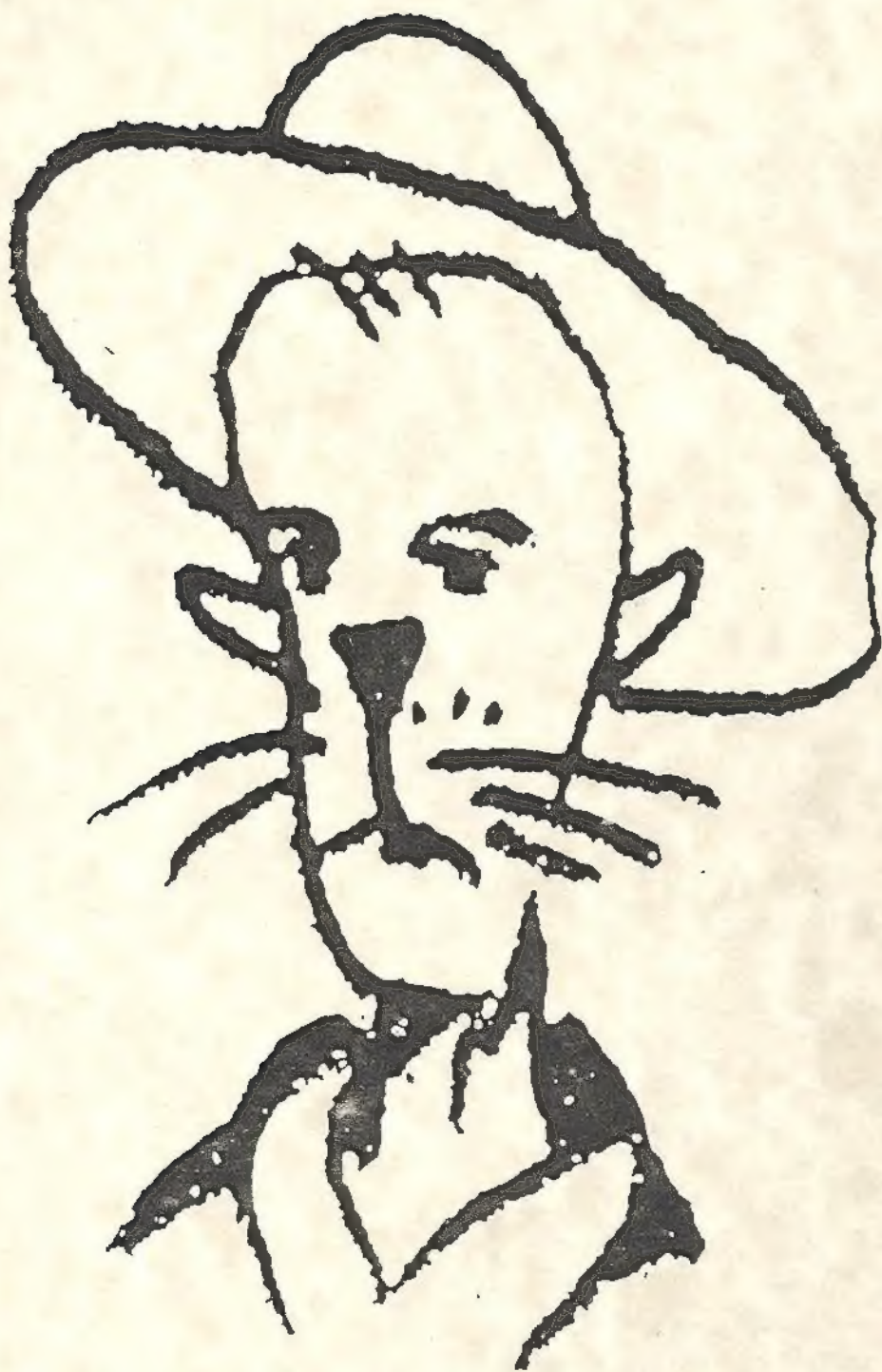
So the next time you spill some juice in Bezango, don't rush out and call the Midnight Sponge Let it sit for a week and then call Alice She will be more than happy to tell you all about mold





Alice has a granddaughter. Her name is Molly. Molly Googybugg. She is such a cute and nice little girl that no one in Bezango wants to say "No" to her. Molly has an unusual hobby. She collects pieces of the road. Molly doesn't wantonly destroy the road, she merely picks up loose pieces of asphalt as it naturally chips off the side. Right now there is a small mountain of asphalt chunks in the backyard of the Googybugg family.

There is only one road that leads into the dead end of Bezango. Once or twice a year, there is no road leading into Bezango. It washes away because key parts of it are in the Googybugg yard. What is remarkable is that it usually takes a week for anyone to notice that the only road leading into Bezango is gone. The Mayor and City Council have talked about approaching Molly and asking her to start some other hobby, but, gosh darn it, she might cry.



There is something odd about Chester, but no one can put their finger on it.